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BUSINESS AND REDUCTIONISM IN EDUCATION

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It is widely perceived that the educational system no longer provides adequate preparation for people to function in a world where social order, economics, the environment and technology are rapidly changing. Our own continuous recession mode where food bank lines, bankruptcies, and bank profits are all at record highs, cultivates an atmosphere of urgency for any change to "fix" the situation.

An educational paradigm shift that will meet the needs of a "globally competitive, technological society" is promoted by a business sector that perceives the erosion of its traditional ability to manage society. Consequently, the corporate sector of society is most obliging in its efforts to direct us towards their own ends.

As the debate over YNN rages, more insidious forms of corporate incursions into the educational system are evident. Business sponsored educational resources, kits, conferences, seminars, forums, self serving promotional literature and grants are all readily available to educators. Although some welcome the incursions of these "partnerships" and "sponsorships", or are pushed towards them by fiscal restraints or an unsympathetic educational system, it is imperative that they be carefully and critically examined.

The influence of business on environmental education is particularly disturbing, since the environment is the foundation of society and the cornerstone for a truly holistic, global education. However, in order to understand corporate influence in an educational context, the nature of reductionism must be understood.

Educational curricula have traditionally developed along a linear path following the mechanistic principles of Newton and Descartes. Our traditional study of nature in isolated compartments leads us to believe that we can manipulate and simplify any one of these "discrete" systems with blatant disregard for the innumerable interconnected systems that are affected by our activities. The devastating repercussions of our technological prowess upon all the interrelated "fragments" of nature, have forced us to realize that nature exists as one extremely complex, interconnected whole. It is dawning on us that it is not possible to break up nature and manage (i.e. control) any so called "isolated" part without affecting the rest of the whole.

Furthermore, we have traditionally viewed the negative consequences of industrial society as limited in scope and isolated in effect. Our attempts at "fixing" a situation usually result in a further upset in the balance of nature. We end up treating the symptoms of a sick industrial society in the misguided belief that we can control an "isolated" effect. For example, we cannot replace a clear cut forest with a tree farm or expect pesticides to kill only the target "pest" species, or reduce industrial pollution while unbridled economic growth continues.

Corporate green projects and public relations promote a technological or knowledge based solution for application to separate parts of nature, without dealing

with the true problem of a materialistic, over-consumptive and power driven society. Token projects are a cosmetic facade obscuring an overwhelmingly negative impact on the environment and the reality of business as usual. As the Tasmanian Green Independents put it "...a company can buy for itself a value judgement, effectively bypassing and undermining students' learning of critical thinking." This strategy redirects our focus from the widespread destruction by industry, to the perfunctory efforts to "remedy" an ostensibly limited problem in the environment.

A fundamental axiom of business is maximization of return for investment. The corporate investment in the green veneer of environmental education is not an exception to this fundamental principle. In this case, the return is the assurance that the future will maintain the current doctrine of growth and development by helping to produce a technologically literate person as a "commodity that is prepared to meet the demands of a globally competitive society." The corporate green infiltration of the educational system is a component of this trend.

The educational system promulgates the reductionist illusion by directing efforts towards knowledge based resources as the solution to our ecological dilemmas. The belief is that science literacy, technological training and service sector growth will save the planet.

Consequently, green teaching largely tends towards a "green veneer" or shallow ecology which maintains that our present society may continue if we do all the fashionable green things, while waiting for the promised technical fix. Although some of these green activities are integral components of a sustainable society, when used as ends unto themselves they are only stop-gap measures that obscure the realities of environmental and societal denigration. What is necessary is a radical departure from the current paradigm of exploitation and growth.

Education must adapt in order to provide the medium for these profound social changes. Holistic perspectives and deep ecology are the foundations of progressive education. They promote the perception of interdependency and intrinsic value in all of the Earth's riches. Fragmented (reductionist) thinking, reflected in contemporary economics, places value only on the "resources" of the Earth that can be exploited for human use.

The first and most essential step in promoting a deep ecological approach in an educational program is to become aware of the artificial barriers that have been constructed between randomly assigned "isolated systems" of nature. This is the belief that we can manage a single part of nature or a solitary destructive event with technological fixes. This is the view typified by the corporate sector that allows one's conscience to practice Earth destroying activities, while believing that "isolated" effects can be managed as long as the trade-offs are economically acceptable. The high tech, economic growth solution to these problems proposed by the business sector indicates the symptomatic focus of their methodology and as such, makes them an unsuitable candidate for developing undistorted

educational models.

Progressive educators are rejecting reductionist thinking and critically assessing all educational enhancement programs and curricula. Progressive educators distinguish between educational wisdom and standardized training in order to make education real and relevant to a holistic world.

*Ecology* must be the focus around which all other educational disciplines are integrated. *Science* must be explored within the context of the laws of thermodynamics, cycles and interdependency, and continuums versus categories, while recognizing the severe limitations of the reductionist scientific method. Economics must encompass its roots in ecology by accepting the internalization of the environmental effects of "progress", the destructiveness of competition, the impossibility of continuous growth, the simplification of human lifestyle, and the vital importance of community. *Social studies* and *global education* must emphasize the extreme decadence of northern developed nations and the imbalance with the third (or rather, two-thirds) world, the fallacy of spiritual fulfilment from consumerism and hedonism, and the mutual exclusion of the concepts "sustainable" and "development".

It is within such a critical and holistic context that business directed educational materials must be viewed. Otherwise, we will maintain the isolationist techniques that have been the hallmarks of the oppressive human presence upon the Earth.

In the end, the methods of green education cannot be reduced to a myopic, finely delineated set of rules. A green teacher must develop an environmental program within the context of their own green commitment rather than quick fixes and blind faith in technology and business as usual.

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